

REMARKS

As a preliminary matter, the undersigned thanks the Examiner for the courtesies extended in the brief telephone conference conducted on March 19, 2001. It was agreed that the Examiner would contact the undersigned in the event that the case is not in condition for allowance by the above amendment.

Claims 1-12 are pending in the application. Claim 1 has been amended.

Beginning with the § 112 (second paragraph) rejection of the claims, Applicant has considered the proposed language by the Examiner directed to claim 1. However, Applicant notes that the Examiner appears to be focusing on the language of claim 1 as pending prior to the last Response filed August 1, 2000. Applicants respectfully submit that the claims in their present form are clearly written and satisfy the specificity requirements of § 112. Thus, it is respectfully requested that this rejection be withdrawn.

Independent claim 1 has been amended to clarify that the at least franking machine is electrically isolated from the network.

In the Office Action, the Examiner acknowledges that Wang (U.S. Patent No. 5,991,746) does not disclose at least one franking machine which is off-line from the network. However, to compensate for this deficiency, the Examiner relies on Hyde, Jr. (U.S. Patent No. 6,038,553). In particular, the Examiner states that the administration module (corresponding to the management server of the invention) makes an off-line connection with the customer service module (the franking machine). The Examiner specifically refers to Figure 1 to support this proposition. However, it is clear from Figure 1 that the administration module 13 are indeed connected via the network 17 to the customer service module 15.

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In contrast, according to the present invention, the franking machine (e.g., 30, 32) is not even connected to the network (40), but rather is electrically isolated from the network, as discussed at page 4, line 14 of the subject application. Indeed, it is believed that this is one of the important features of the present invention. The reason why there is no physical link between these franking machines and the network is that these machines are electromechanical franking machines which do not have a modem or a communications interface.

In view of the above amendments to claim 1 and the above arguments, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 patentably distinguishes over the cited art.

With respect to claim 12, as pointed out in the last response, the prior art fails to disclose the feature of claim 12 in which a user receives from a display of the supervision terminal a menu of the last indexes validated by the management server as statistical data indicative of franking performed by the plurality of the franking machines. Applicants respectfully refer the Examiner to the previous Response (incorporated herein by reference) which outlines this argument in greater detail.

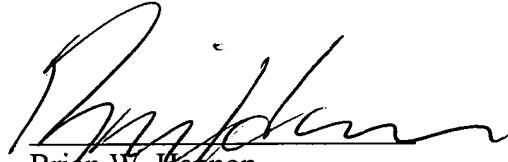
In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. It is therefore respectfully requested that the Amendment be entered and the claims be allowed.

If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

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Applicant hereby petitions for any extension of time which may be required to maintain the pendency of this case, and any required fee, except for the Issue Fee, for such extension is to be charged to Deposit Account No. 19-4880.

Respectfully submitted,



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APPENDIX

VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE CLAIMS:

The claims are amended as follows:

Claim 1. (Twice Amended). A process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, at least one of the franking machines being ~~off line and not connected to~~ electrically isolated from the public communications network, the process comprising the steps of:

first establishing a link with a management server through the public communications network, via at least one supervision terminal that is independent of the ~~off line~~ isolated franking machine, in accordance with a protocol of communication; and

subsequently proceeding with an exchange of data between the supervision terminal and the management server during which a user (1) acquires at the supervision terminal a current invoicing index indicative of the ~~off line~~ isolated franking machine and (2) receives a code of authorization to frank in order to validate the subsequent frankings of the ~~off line~~ isolated franking machine.